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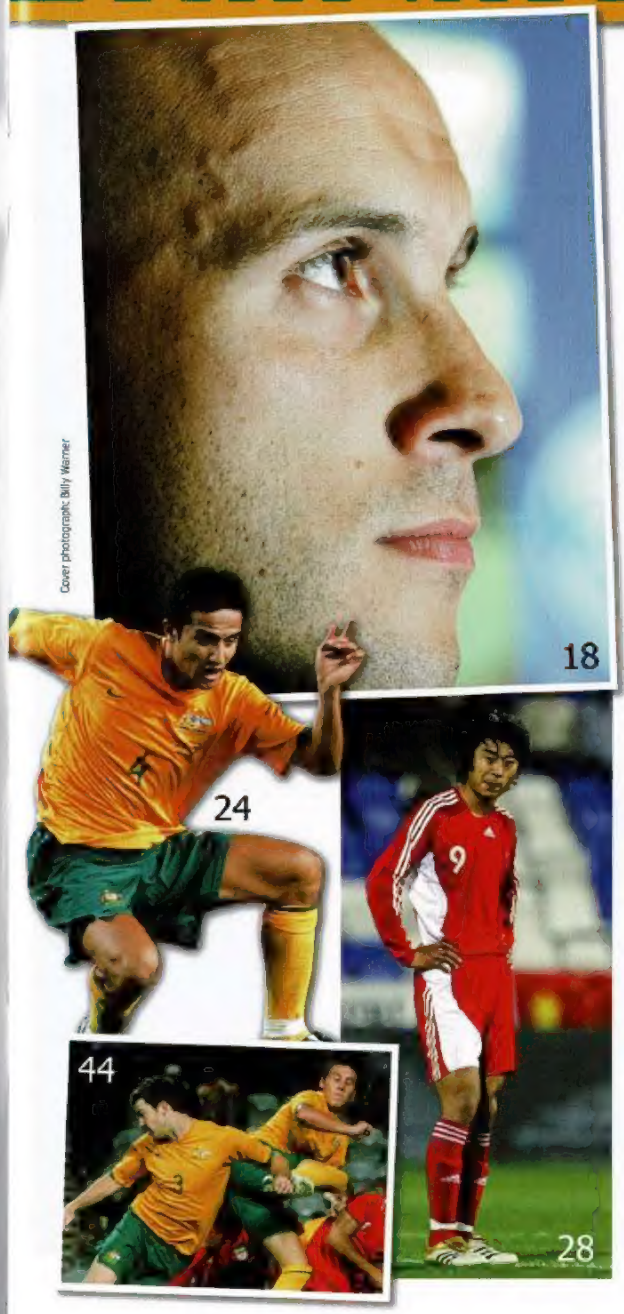

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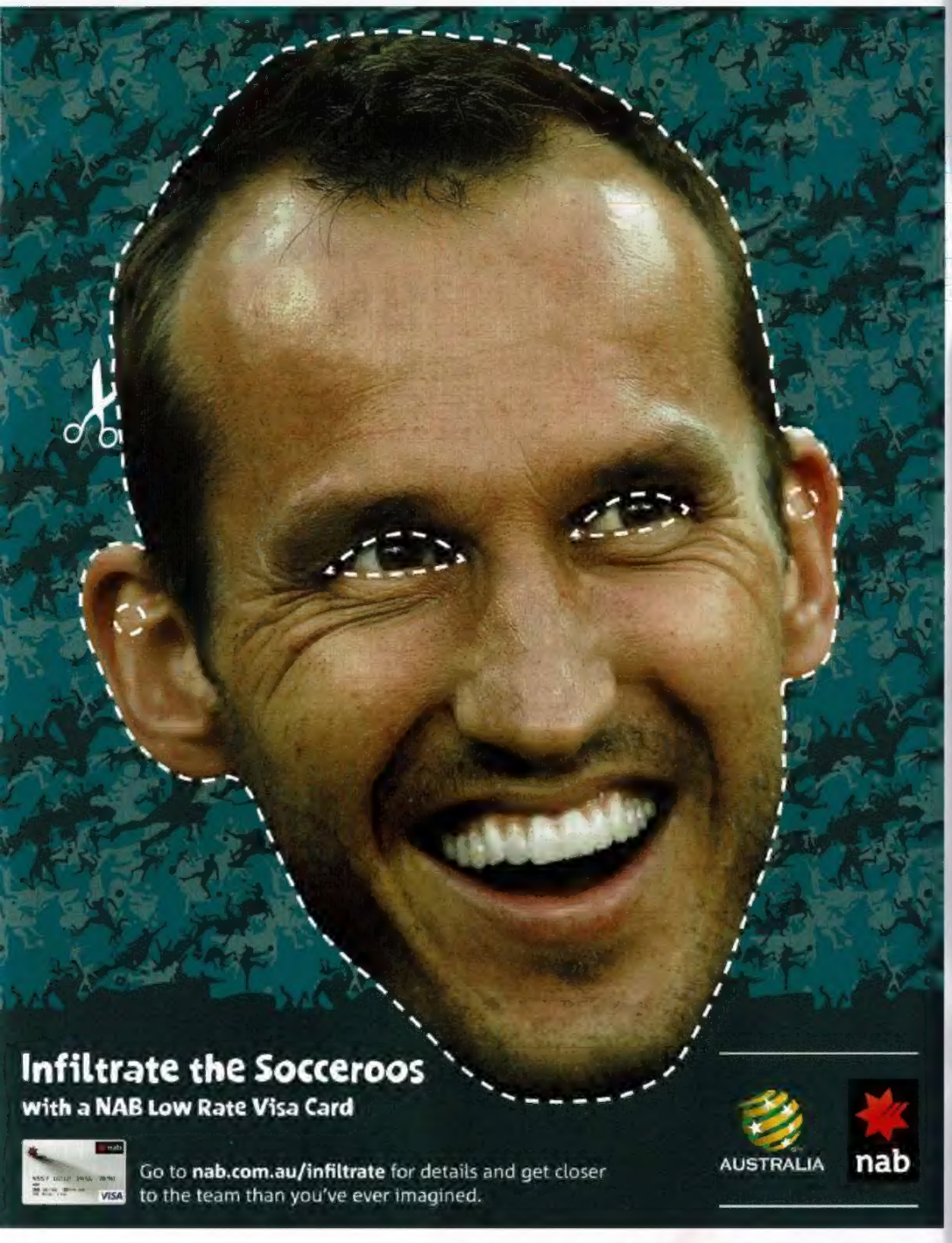

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PIM'S AUSSIE CAMP

June has been a super month for Aussie fans, as international matches come thick and fast. Yet it has also been a blessing for Australian coach Pim Verbeek.

In his first six months in charge up until May, Verbeek had precious little time with many of his overseas-based stars.

Following a week in Australia and two in the distraction-less, physically demanding Middle East, Verbeek now has more intimate knowledge of men like Scott McDonald (*below*).

We can expect to see this knowledge pay dividends on the road to South Africa, starting against China tonight.

MORRIS IEMMA

MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER OF NEW SOUTH WALES

"Tonight ends an intense month of matches for the Qantas Socceroos' World Cup campaign"

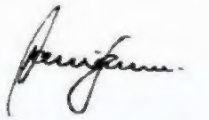
A warm welcome to the Chinese team, and welcome back to Sydney to the Qantas Socceroos.

Tonight's 2010 FIFA World Cup preliminary round qualifier against China ends an intense month of matches for the Qantas Socceroos' World Cup campaign that began with the friendly international against Ghana in Sydney on May 23 and included World Cup qualifiers against Iraq and Qatar in Brisbane, Dubai and Doha during June.

Tonight's match against an emerging football power in China takes place only weeks before the world's most populous nation stages the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games where the Qantas Under 23s will represent Australia in the Olympic Football Tournament.

As with the 2007 AFC Asian Cup, these World Cup qualification matches have again demonstrated the transforming effect on the world game in Australia of our membership to the Asian Football Confederation.

The New South Government is a proud supporter of Football Federation Australia and I wish the Socceroos all the best for tonight's crucial match on the road to South Africa 2010.



Morris Iemma, MP
Premier of New South Wales

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BEATING BRAZIL FOR BRONZE

Four years after their runners-up performance at the 1997 FIFA Confederations Cup, the Qantas Socceroos proved that result was no fluke, taking out the bronze medal in the 2001 tournament held in South Korea.

Having beaten Mexico 2-0 in their first match, the Australians then produced the performance of the tournament, beating eventual winners France 1-0 (*pictured right*). They lost their third group match to hosts South Korea however, giving top spot in the group back to the French. This set up a semi-final with Japan. Unfortunately however, Australia's difficulties with Asian sides in the tournament continued, and they went down by a single goal.

Yet the tournament was not quite over. Four years after a 6-0 loss in the 1997 final to Brazil, the side would again meet the South Americans giants. This time however, Australia got its revenge. Defender Shaun Murphy beat Brazilian keeper Dida in the 84th minute to claim a 1-0 win and the bronze medal (*pictured below*).

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ON THE BALL

Football News

Image used courtesy of the Asian Football Confederation

GALLANT MATILDAS FINISH FOURTH

Australia have finished in fourth spot at the 2008 AFC Women's Asian Cup after a 3-0 defeat against world number ten Japan. The Matildas faced off against the strong and well-drilled outfit in the third place play-off match at the Thong Nhat Stadium in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Led by coach Tom Sermanni, the Matildas started the match in bright fashion with midfielder Collette McCallum hitting the post with a free kick, before Japan scored the only goal of the half moments later through a 16th minute strike from Youki Nagasato.

Australia stayed in the game until the last ten minutes when they were deflated by two stunning goals in a match played in high humidity. Firstly, Aya Miyama struck with a 30 metre free kick, then with two minutes to go Japanese playmaker Homare Sawa hit a first time effort from the edge of the penalty area.

"Japan were fair winners tonight and thoroughly deserved their win," said a disappointed Sermanni. "We did superbly well in the first 20 minutes but conceded the first goal which deflated us with the first goal proving critical throughout this tournament.

"We have achieved our initial goal which was to qualify for the semi-finals, and the tournament has also provided us with an excellent opportunity to blood some young players in tough international competition. However leaving aside the disrupted preparation, we have however performed below par in a number of areas and we will work hard to rectify that.

"This tournament has shown us the level we need to reach in Asia which is very strong and continually improving. This tournament has also shown the level of conditioning that is required to compete in these conditions and some individuals within the group have learnt that a lack of preparation and fitness will be found out at this level."

The campaign had started brightly for the Matildas, who beat Chinese Taipei and then a strong South Korea side in their first two matches. Though their third group game ended in a 3-1 defeat (also against Japan), Australia claimed a semi-final berth on goal difference ahead of South Korea. All three teams finished with six points but Australia qualified second in the group with a goal difference of 7-3 ahead of the Koreans' goal difference of 5-3.

The Matildas were forced to rely on a goal from defender Clare Polkinghorne with 20 minutes remaining to progress to the next stage after being 3-0 down five minutes into the second half.

With a three way head-to-head being the first determining factor, Australia would have fallen behind South Korea in the race for the semi-finals but for Polkinghorne's goal. With Japan ahead amongst the three teams that were equal on points, and goal difference equal between Australia and South Korea in matches featuring all three teams, goal difference across the entire group was the final determining factor.

Yet after qualifying for the semi-finals, the Matildas came up against a challenging DPR (North) Korean side. Thanks to a hat-trick from the North Korean captain and reigning AFC Women's Player of the Year Ri Kum Suk, Australia fell to a 3-0 defeat.

The Matildas are currently in South Korea competing in the prestigious Peace Cup where they have been drawn to play the USA, Italy and Brazil.

MATCH DETAILS-THIRD PLACE PLAYOFF:

AUSTRALIA 0 v **JAPAN 3**
(Youki Nagasato 16', Aya Miyama 79', Homare Sawa 88')
Australian line-up: Melissa Barbieri (gk); Kim Carroll (Ellyse Perry 58'), Cheryl Salisbury, Clare Polkinghorne, Karla Reuter, Amy Chapman, Lauren Colthorpe, Collette McCallum (Ella Mastrantonio 75'), Heather Garriock, Lisa De Vanna, Kate Gill (Kate McShea 68').
Referee: Eun Ah Hong (Sth Korea)

AUSTRALIA AND ITALY FORM FRIENDSHIP

The number three country in world football has joined forces with Football Federation Australia in an historic agreement announced recently at the FIFA World Congress.

FFA Chairman, Frank Lowy, and the President of the Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio (FIGC or Italian Football Federation), Dr Giancarlo Abete, signed the agreement in Sydney just prior to the official start of the Opening Ceremony of the FIFA World Congress at the beginning of this month.

"Italy and Australia have long had a close relationship at all levels because of the large number of Australians of Italian origin," said Mr Lowy.

"The Italian football team is also one of the great exponents of football and has thrilled many football fans over the years.

"This agreement reinforces the depth of the relationship between our countries, and also broadens it to include our shared passion for the beautiful game."

The agreement includes the sharing of resources and expertise, including technical exchange in the areas of coaching, referees, game development, youth football, women's football, sports science and medicine and others.

"This is an exchange in every sense of the word," Mr Lowy said.

"In some areas, the FIGC clearly offer great experience and expertise, and in other areas Australia does."

The FIGC will also provide advice and expertise to FFA in developing the 'Home of Football' in Australia which is to include a technical centre and a domestic training base for Australia's nine national teams.

Mr Lowy said the agreement also covers cooperation in the staging of international friendly matches between the men's and women's teams at all age groups as well as futsal.

"The 'Azzurri' defeated us on the field in Germany in a very hard fought battle between us, and they went on to win the 2006 FIFA World Cup.

"We are delighted to form this relationship with FIGC," Mr Lowy said.

CHAIRMAN: WE WANT 2018

Following the FIFA World Congress earlier this month, Football Federation Australia Chairman, Frank Lowy AC, reaffirmed the organisation's focus on the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

"I want to make it clear that we are aiming to host the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

"While I understand that there is a view emanating from Europe that it may well be the turn of Europe to be the hosts in 2018, the fact is football is a world game.

"Europe has unquestionably been the focus of football growth and development for much of the past 80 years, but the future of football is in the 'new world' - that is, the developing and growing regions of the world such as Asia."

Mr Lowy pointed out that Australia is part of the Asian Football Confederation - the fastest growing region in world football - with a mushrooming economy.

He also said that FIFA has indicated that the bids for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups could be bundled together.

"But I repeat that our focus is on 2018 because it is a powerful way to develop football in the Asian region and we have the capacity to host a major sporting event in this timeframe."

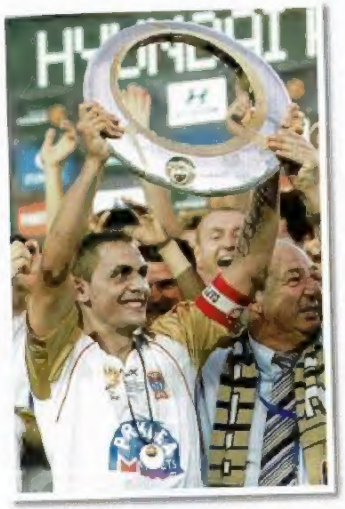
He said that if Australia is unsuccessful in 2018 it does not rule out a 2022 bid.

Staging a major international event such as a World Cup has enormous economic and social benefits for the nation and Mr Lowy believes this should be another key reason behind Australia's bid. A 2004 study by URS Finance and Economics on the economic impact of the 2003 Rugby World Cup found that the total 'value added' to the Australian economy was $289 million. By comparison, the same study noted that the total value added for the Sydney Olympic Games was $6.5 billion, and for the FIFA World Cup held in Japan and Korea in 2002 was $27.7 billion.

"There is a cost to mounting a bid but, if successful, it is an investment which will pay dividends for the nation and future generations," said Mr Lowy.

"We are also confident that we have strong support from other countries around the world to bid for 2018, and we will be proceeding on this basis."

TEN MORE WANT IN



Ten expressions of interest from groups interested in obtaining a license for a Hyundai A-League club were considered by the Board of the Football Federation Australia earlier this month.

"The number of proposals we have received reflects the momentum behind the growth and development of the Hyundai A-League," said FFA CEO, Mr Ben Buckley.

The regions covered by the franchise proposals are western Sydney, Wollongong, Melbourne, the Gold Coast and Townsville.

Buckley said that FFA was in active discussions with two consortia interested in a Townsville-based Hyundai A-League Club - one led by businesswoman Milissa Fischer, and the other by local businessman Don Matheson.

"We are having further discussions with both Ms Fischer's and Mr Matheson's groups and we expect to be entering into exclusive negotiations with one of them by the end of this month," Buckley said.

Other proposals received include three seeking to have the second Melbourne license, two groups vying for the western Sydney license and one covering Wollongong and the NSW south coast.

The FFA Board Hyundai A-League Expansion sub-Committee will consider the Melbourne, western Sydney and Wollongong proposals further, and will determine a process and timeframe to award further licenses.

"We are very encouraged with the level of interest in the Hyundai A-League," Buckley said.

"Since it commenced just three years ago, it has already had 'cut through' in the busy Australian sporting landscape with average crowds, viewership, membership, media coverage and profitability trending upwards each and every season.

"The attractiveness of the competition is clearly reflected in the level of interest in the additional licenses."

FFA's view is that the Hyundai A-League has the capacity to become at least a 12 team competition.

"When and where we expand the competition is measured simply by whether it is right for football, right for the existing Hyundai A-League clubs, right for the new clubs and right for the local community," Buckley said.

AUSSIE FOOTBALL TEAMS UP WITH UNICEF

Football Federation Australia and UNICEF Australia have announced their new partnership to benefit vulnerable children in Australia and Asia.

UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, is the leading, effective global organisation working on development and emergency relief around the world. Achieving results for over 60 years, UNICEF helps children to survive and thrive by providing communities with essential medicines, vaccines, educational, and emergency supplies.

The FFA joins a prestigious group of global football bodies, clubs and players partnering with UNICEF.

The partnership follows in the footsteps of FIFA's support for UNICEF through the FIFA World Cup and FIFA Women's World Cup, UNICEF's partnerships with Barcelona FC, Manchester United and Real Madrid, and support by UNICEF Ambassadors such as David Beckham and Harry Kewell.

Ben Buckley, chief executive of the FFA, said all the staff and players are thrilled to partner with UNICEF.

"Football has the power to unite children all over the world. Football in Australia is going through a growth period and what better way to take advantage of this than to join the global football community in its partnership with UNICEF to help millions of vulnerable children."

Initially, the FFA partnership will support UNICEF community development programs for children in Papua New Guinea, Iraq and Indigenous communities within Australia.

"Sport and play are important to UNICEF because they are vital elements in the health, happiness and well-being of children and young people," said UNICEF chief executive Carolyn Hardy.

"UNICEF achieves results and together with the FFA, we will use sport-based programs to deliver important messages about child health and well-being, improve children's lives and strengthen communities. Outreach to FFA supporters in Australia will provide vital funds for these programs."

The partnership for children is being promoted extensively at the upcoming FIFA World Cup qualifiers in Australia and overseas through matchday announcements, advertisements featuring Qantas Socceroo ambassadors, and promotion to FFA supporters.

PRE-SEASON ALMOST HERE

The Hyundai A-League season is looming large and the eight clubs are already well into preparations for the new campaign. The first competitive tests arrive in less than a month as part of the 2008 Pre-Season Cup. See below for all the fixtures with local kick-off times.

Saturday July 19
Sydney FC vs Queensland Roar
Campbelltown Sports Stadium, 7.00pm
Perth Glory vs Newcastle Jets
Hyundai Stadium, Mandurah, 3.00pm

Sunday July 20
Wellington Phoenix vs Central Coast
Westpac Stadium, Wellington, 4.00pm
Melbourne Victory vs Adelaide United
Aurora Stadium, Launceston, 1.00pm

Saturday July 26
Perth Glory vs Melbourne Victory
Members Equity Stadium, Perth, 6.30pm
Newcastle Jets vs Adelaide United
Baddeley Park, Cessnock, 7.00pm

Sunday July 27
Central Coast Mariners vs Sydney FC
Bluetongue Stadium, Gosford, 3.00pm
Queensland Roar vs Wellington Phoenix
Stockland Park, Sunshine Coast, 2.30pm

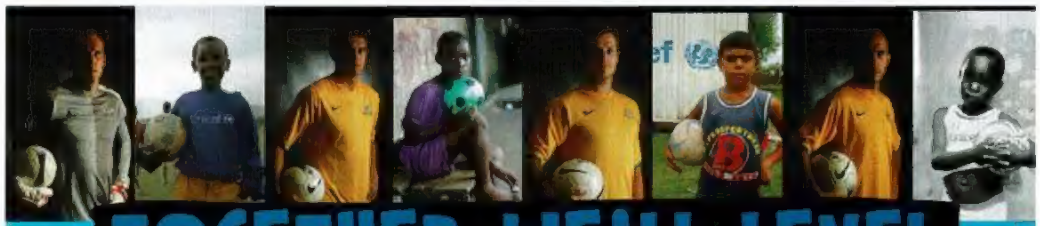
Saturday, August 2
Newcastle Jets vs Melbourne Victory
Port Macquarie Regional Stadium, 2.30pm
Adelaide United vs Perth Glory
Vansittart Park, Mt Gambier, 2.30pm
Sydney FC vs Wellington Phoenix
WIN Stadium, Wollongong, 7.00pm

Sunday, August 3
Queensland Roar vs Central Coast
Perry Park, Brisbane, 3.00pm

Wednesday, August 6
Final: Winner Pool A vs. Winner Pool B

Note: Match date and kick-off times are subject to change without notice.

HYUNDAI A-LEAGUE



TOGETHER WE'LL LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD

No matter how little a child has, if they have their health, they have a shot at a future. Which is why UNICEF Australia and Football Federation Australia are teaming up to create crucial sports-based community programs for underprivileged children whose lives are at risk from poverty, disease and violence in places such as Papua New Guinea, Iraq and even parts of Australia. And now we're asking you to join the team. Please donate whatever you can at www.unicef.org.au

unicef | FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA

FOOTBALL SUPERSTAR SEARCH IS ON

Football Superstar, a new reality television show aimed at unearthing Australia's next big football talent, has started screening this week on FOX8.

Hosted by Irish singer/songwriter Brian McFadden and ex-Matildas player Amy Taylor and screened at 7:30pm on Thursdays, FOX8's series is the only Australian television program of its kind that will embark on a search for a gifted young football player.

The winner will walk off the pitch with a prize package consisting of a season-long contract with the Sydney FC youth squad, along with a one-year scholarship with Macquarie University.

Try-outs have been held in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth, attracting hundreds of young footballers, aged between 16 and 21 years.

The judging panel of three consists of Head Judge, Sydney FC Head Coach John Kosmina, Steve O'Connor (Sydney FC's youth league coach), with the third judge alternating between Nik Agicocostas (Sydney FC Strength and Conditioning Coach) and Vitali Ferranti (Director of Fun Sports Group and *Football Superstar* mentor).

Kosmina and his fellow judges will whittle down the triallists to 15 finalists who will spend a month at Sydney FC's training ground at Macquarie University.

The chosen 15 will live in a mansion with mentor Vitali Ferranti, as they're given a taste of what a professional footballer's lifestyle could be like.

During their stay, the hopefuls are judged on both their on-field performance and off-field behaviour, with players being evicted by the judging panel and sent home each week.

Throughout the series, the boys will play full football matches against teams including the AIS, Manly United and the Central Coast Mariners youth team and will be given a broad array of weekly challenges including an iron man competition, army assault course and public speaking and talent competitions.

They will also be visited by high-profile football stars from leading Hyundai A-League teams, get the opportunity to meet and train with the Young Matildas, attend a Qantas Socceroos game, as well as receive media training and even tips on personal grooming.

In the final episode, the three remaining players compete in the last trial and Kosmina will anoint one lucky player the grand prize of being crowned as Australia's first *Football Superstar*.

FOOTBALL AMBASSADORS JOIN GROWING FAMILY

Football Federation Australia (FFA) recently named the first group of hand-picked football ambassadors who will form an important part of Australia's growing family of football supporters.

"Just as football appeals to a wide range of Australians right across the spectrum, our chosen Ambassadors reflect this diversity and are drawn from all walks of life," said FFA CEO, Ben Buckley.

"Our ambassadors include politicians, journalists, sports people, entrepreneurs, chefs and performers.

"Some of our Ambassadors love the excitement of big international matches; others simply enjoy a kick in the park with their kids; others just get a kick out of supporting the team that unites Australians - the Qantas Socceroos."

Buckley said that the ambassadors will tell their own story, and promote Australia and Australian football as FFA builds towards its aspirations to host the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

THE AMBASSADORS NAMED BY BUCKLEY

Ahmed Fahour, CEO, National Australia Bank
Alex Perry, fashion designer
Anthony La Paglia, actor *(pictured)*
Cameron Williams, TV presenter
George Negus, journalist
Geraldine Doogue, journalist
Ian Thorpe, sportsman
Jeff Fenech, sportsman
John Stanley, radio presenter
Kari Stefanovic, TV presenter
Kate Ellis, Minister for Sport
Mike Conway, representing The Wiggles
Stephanie Brantz, TV presenter
Stephen Conroy, Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy

Qantas Futsalroos undone by hosts

The Qantas Futsalroos bowed out of the AFC Futsal Championship thus missing a place at the FIFA Futsal World Cup later this year, after they being beaten 5-2 by Thailand in their quarter final clash in May.

Fernando de Moraes scored a double for Australia, but it wasn't enough against the hosts, who got off to a quickfire start and backed by a vocal crowd, never looked like surrendering their lead.

With captain Lachlan Wright and Chris Zeballos suspended, Australia was behind the eight-ball from the start, and two goals by Eakapong Suratsawang in the opening minutes were a killer for Scott Gilligan's team.

De Moraes pulled a goal back in the 14th minute, but three minutes later Thailand regained their two-goal lead.

Australia, with the help of an extra man following the dismissal of a Thai player, started to gain some control and scored a fine goal to pull the score back to 3-2.

But with five minutes remaining, Thailand's captain Panuwat Janta eased Thai fans' nerves with a goal from close range. For the second game running, Gilligan took off his goalkeeper for an extra attacker in search of goals.

The goals never came and Panomkorn walked the ball into the net for the Thais' fifth goal after he dispossessed the last defender.

A disappointed Gilligan lamented the loss of Wright and Zeballos, given they had provided the team with valuable goals in the group matches.

"I think the turning point was the game before when we had two suspended players," he said.

"Both were the two leading goal scorers in the team for this tournament and it was pretty obvious that that was going to affect us.

"Obviously not going to the World Cup is very disappointing and that's the issue."

Only the top four teams from the AFC Futsal Championship progressed to the Futsal World Cup later this in Brazil, which will not feature an Australian team for the first time in the competition's history.

DRAW LOOMS

The path for Asian teams to the 2010 FIFA World Cup will soon enter the last phase with the draw for the fourth and last round of qualifiers at AFC House in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on June 27, 2008.

The draw, scheduled for Friday 7pm Sydney time, will see the ten teams to qualify from the current stage coming out of the pots to be divided into two groups of five.

The winners and runners-up of these two groups will represent Asia at the FIFA World Cup 2010. The third-placed teams in both groups will clash in a home-and-away play-off with the winners going into another double-legged playoff against an Oceania Football Confederation team for the final place at South Africa in 2010.

The next phase involves ten match days, beginning on September 6, 2008, and finishing on June 17, 2009.

The 32-team draw for the 2010 FIFA World Cup Finals (June 11 to July 11) will take place in Cape Town in December 2009.

PHASE FOUR QUALIFIERS - MATCH DAYS

1: September 6, 2008
2: September 10, 2008
3: October 15, 2008
4: November 19, 2008
5: February 11, 2009
6: March 28, 2009
7: April 1, 2009
8: June 6, 2009
9: June 10, 2009
10: June 17, 2009

Adelaide to face Kashima

Adelaide United will face the Kashima Antlers of Japan in the quarter-finals of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Champions League following the draw at AFC House in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in late May.

Adelaide United became the first Australian club to progress to the knock-out phase of Asia's premier club football competition when they drew nil-all with Changchun Yatai (China) in their final group match to top Group E.

The Kashima Antlers qualified for the quarter-finals after topping Group F with 15 points and are currently placed sixth in the J.League.

The AFC Champions League 2008 knock-out stages are played over two legs (home and away) with the quarter-finals scheduled for September 17 and 24, the semi-finals on October 8 and 22, with the finals to be played on November 5 and November 12.

Should Adelaide United be successful in their quarter-final against Kashima Antlers, they would face either Saipa (Iran) or Kuruvchi (Uzbekistan) in the semi-finals.

QUARTER-FINAL PAIRINGS

Saipa (Iran) **vs Kuruvchi** (Uzbekistan)

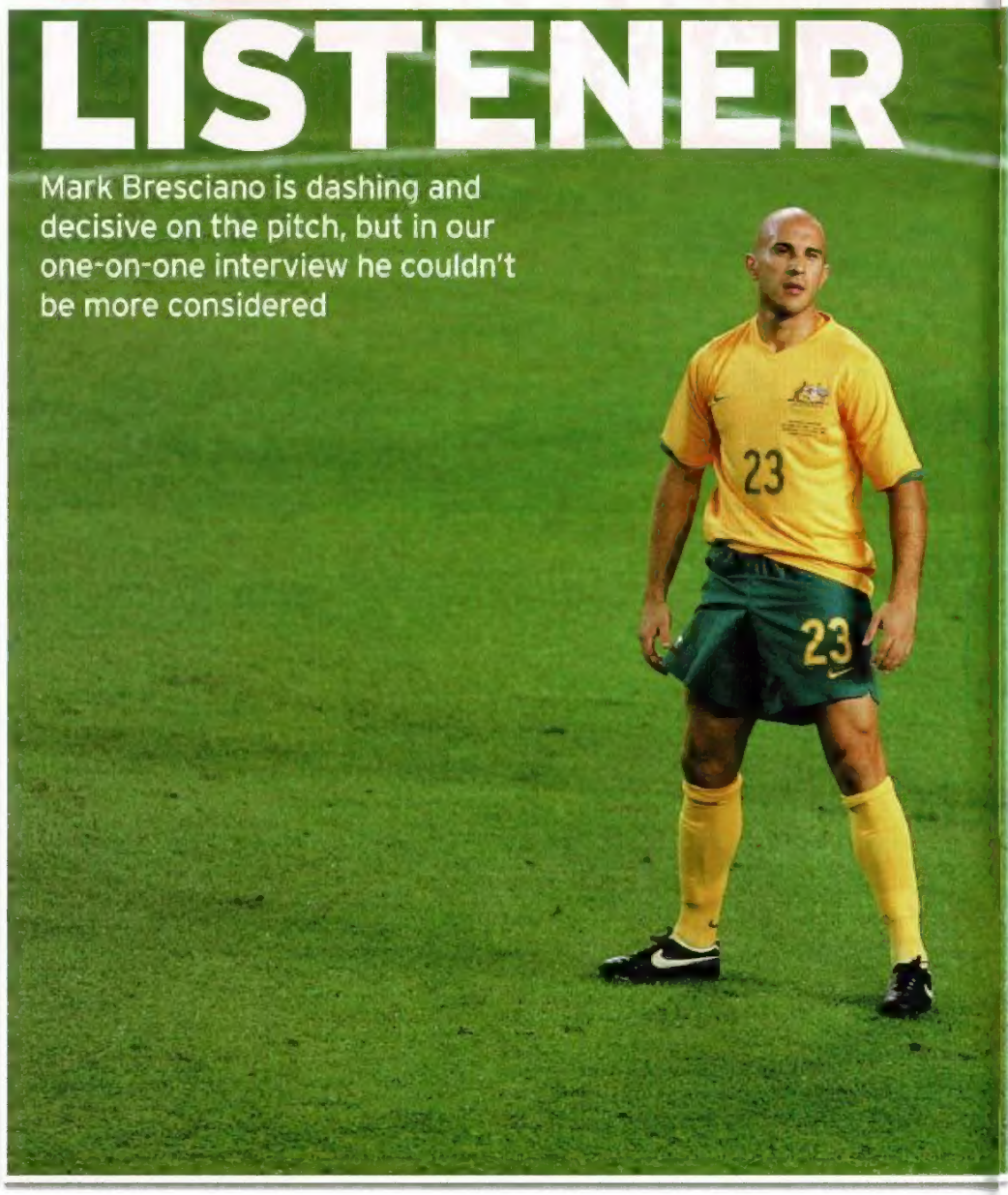
Kashima Antlers (Japan) **vs Adelaide United** (Australia)

Al Qadsia (Kuwait) **vs Urawa Red Diamonds** (Japan)

Al Karama (Syria) **vs Gamba Osaka** (Japan)

THE LISTENER

Mark Bresciano is dashing and decisive on the pitch, but in our one-on-one interview he couldn't be more considered



Mark after scoring one of Australia's great goals against Bahrain in 2006

***The Socceroo*: How do you like to spend your time in the off-season?**
Mark: Basically I spend it with my family and my friends. I try to spend as much time as I can with them.

Do you go away at all, or just head back to Melbourne?
Mainly Melbourne, because my wife's from Melbourne as well. We've got plenty of people to see and catch up with some people. I think there's never enough time. For the past few years we've never really moved out of Melbourne.

What are the things you most look forward to coming home to?
Just all the boy things: going dancing, going motorbike riding, going go-karting. In the summer, the jetski or boats. Always something active.

Would your coaches be happy if you were out say, bungie jumping?
We just don't tell them what we do! Nah... just as long as it's sensible. We don't go stupid. Be sensible, be safe.

How happy are you with your form and fitness levels?
I'm coming off a pretty bad season. I didn't play in many games this year due to a lot of things and a couple of injuries. Now I'm okay fitness wise. I missed the last two games in the Serie A with a little injury. It's just been a little on and off.

Is confidence a bit low?
Maybe it does drop a bit; I haven't played as many league games as I would like and maybe the performances haven't been the best. But that's okay. It takes a split second to get your confidence back.

CHINESE CHECKING

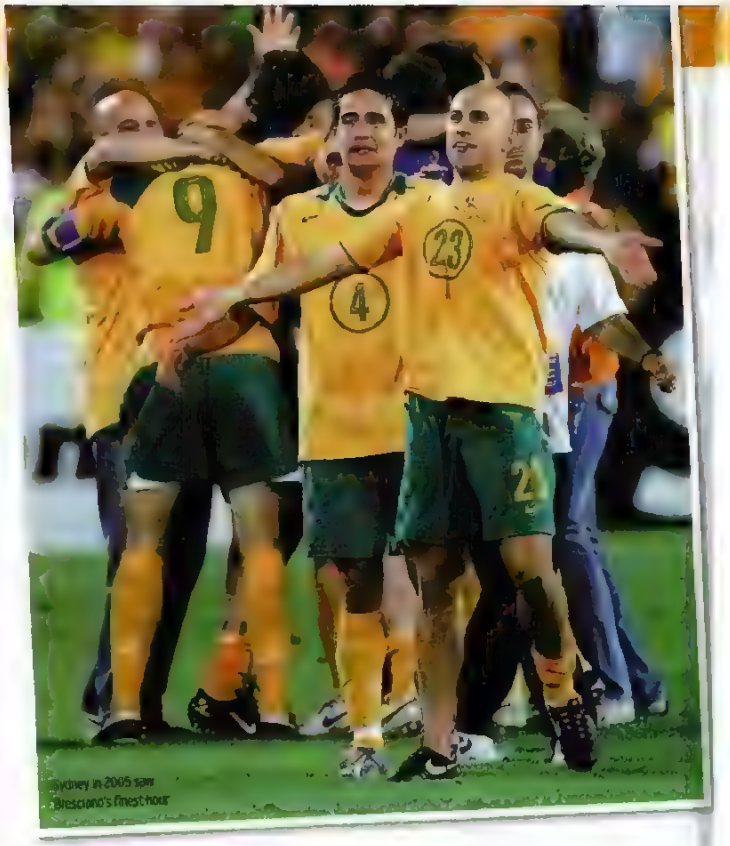
Remembering China, how did their side compare to Iraq and Qatar?
I think China are a lot more physical. Probably more organised as well defensively. Again, like I said, another condition we experienced was playing at altitude, which was a different style of play. There it's also hard to read a team, or understand how a team plays. I think it's going to be a whole different game coming to Sydney and playing China.

What is it about playing at altitude that makes it so difficult?
The first and the major factor is the breathing. You use your breath up much more quickly and it takes you longer to recover. The other thing we experienced was the flight of the ball. When the ball travels in the air, it's hard to predict how it's going to move, where it's going to drop, or if it's going to stay in the air, which made it very difficult for us.

At what point do you really start feeling the aerobic effects?
When you just walk around you don't feel it, it's actually when you start training and start playing that you feel like you're losing your breath more easier. Obviously it started at the first training session.

What about how you felt during the actual match?
In the match you probably won't run as much as if you were playing in normal conditions. Tactically you're playing a different game, a different style of football, where you're not trying to tire yourself out too quickly.

Did you find in those kinds of matches that you're thinking, 'look I better not make this run given it might hurt me in ten minutes'?
Not really. I probably did a little bit, but in most situations where you make decisions that could win or lose a game, you don't think about it. It's just a job



Sydney in 2005 saw Bresciano's finest hour

that's got to be done. If there's a chance to score or a chance to save a goal, you're not going to be thinking 'am I going to recover for the next one?' You've just got to do what you've got to do.

Which of the Chinese players impressed you?
I think Sun, he plays for Manchester City. Sun Jihai, he was playing in midfield when we played them. He had a good game I thought.

Were you surprised they didn't push on more looking for the win?
I think they were pushing as much as they could. We had our opportunities, but I think 0-0 was a fair result.

JUNE ADJUSTMENTS

How is the atmosphere developing within the squad?
Excellent. A lot of the boys have been together for so long, the friendship that the players have built between each other, and even with the young boys coming through – they look good. They've fitted well into the team which is good, and which is a big help for us, because we [the senior players] want to be leading them. There are so many games coming on, and as we've seen with injuries and people missing games, we need everyone we can.

How are the younger players adapting to life within the national setup?
They've actually fitted in pretty well. The fact that there's a bunch of them probably makes it easier for them to settle in and make their way into the team. They are here because they've all got good qualities, they're great players and strong personalities. The selections that [the coaches] have made that have come into the team have been good. They're fitting in very well with us.

Is anyone in particularly impressing in training?
It's not fair to say one because they're all doing very well. Like I said they're all good players, quality players.

People have said that Chris Coyne has brought a bigger vocal element to the defence...
That's probably something that comes with the little bit more experience that Chris Coyne has. I see he can organise the defence very well. Verbally as well: he controls his players which is important in the backline.

Has Pim personally opened up much to the players?
A little bit, not much. But it's probably [because he's in] the position of the head coach. Apart from the training sessions and meals we don't really see him. But what we've seen from him he seems like a very reasonable man.

We haven't conceded many goals but we also haven't scored many so far in the group stage. Where do you think the team's at?
It's tough because after the last World Cup campaign we lost a lot of players, a lot of experienced players. That was probably the big step where we had to make that new transition with new players coming in, filling in and just the new boys coming in. It always takes time in a team, y'know? When new people come in, a new coach, new staff, new players, it always takes a little bit of time to know firstly what the coach wants, and secondly how the players play with each other. I think so far things are going pretty good to be fair. The time we're spending together, we've got almost the whole month of June together, so this is a great opportunity to train, get guys used to each other, learn about each other and the way we've got to play.

What has Pim been focusing during training sessions?
It really depends on the game. In Brisbane you play one style, then you go to the Middle East and you completely change your style of football because the conditions don't allow you to play the way you'd like to play. It hasn't been easy for the players and the coach, changing styles and formation and the way you're going to play. Every game is different, every game you approach is different because firstly the opposition's different, and the conditions are always different.

Compared Guus Hiddink and Graham Arnold, what is Pim like?
They're pretty similar. But coaches are always going to have their own ideas, ways of playing. They've all been very good at preparing the games, leading up to games, they prepare the team the best way they can.

ITALIAN STORY

Jose Mourinho has just signed on as coach of Inter Milan. Do you think he will draw more attention to Serie A?
I don't think one man can do all that, I think it's basically going to be the same.

Do you think people are losing interest in Serie A?
The thing is it doesn't get as much coverage as the Premier League, which is a massive thing. The Premier League is shown all around the world. The Serie A... if you're in Italy you can watch every game, but if you're outside of Italy it's hard to see games.

Are you still enjoying your time over there?
Yeah, still enjoying it. It's a great lifestyle

A DIFFICULT SEASON

Season 2007/08 has been a difficult one for Mark. Last off season he was wanted by Sven-Goran Eriksson at English club Manchester City.

A deal appeared to have been struck, but there was disagreement between City and Palermo about how to structure the transfer fee payments. Having been keen to go to Manchester, he returned to Sicily to find himself on the outer at his club.

He told *FourFourTwo* earlier this year: "I say I'm over it now, but it took me like half a season to get over. I found it very hard to come back. So, I found it hard mentally to return and perform."

Mark played less than half the number of minutes for Palermo this season as he did last season, and his goal tally dropped from six to one.

He has already been linked by English media this off season in transfers to several clubs in England including Fulham and West Ham.

WHERE'S BRESH?

Since the 2006 FIFA World Cup, the Australian side has been undergoing a transition. Established stars such as Craig Moore and Tony Popovic have retired, and fringe players like David Carney and Nick Carle have begun to make an impact. Of the first team in Germany who are still regularly playing for the national side, Bresciano has made perhaps the fewest gains in establishing himself as a team leader.

His struggles culminated in being left on the bench in the match against Iraq in Dubai – the match that also resulted in our first qualifying loss. He points to his difficult recent season at Palermo, where transfer speculation and injury prevented him from performing at his best.

Yet Bresciano remains one of Australia's most talented players. His goal-scoring ability and set-piece delivery (for example, he almost won last year's friendly against Argentina with his free-kicks) make him, in top form, one of the key ingredients to our success.

At age 28, Bresciano's cunning and creativity should only just be reaching their peak. If he can find regular first team football again, he is sure to reclaim his place as one of the first names on the Qantas Socceroos team sheet. For the sake of all Australian fans, let's hope Mark can find the right role at a top club side soon.

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Mark battling against AC Milan

living in Italy. Playing over there was obviously always a dream of mine.

You once said you wanted to be the best Aussie ever in Serie A. Has that ambition changed?
Yeah. If someone would have asked me if I would leave Italy four years ago, I would have said no way. But now, I would really think about changing countries, going into a new league, just trying something different. I'm more open now to trying something different.

Is that simply because as you get older you're more open to things?
I don't know, maybe because I've been there for so many years now that I would just like to maybe have a change, try something different. Have some new excitement. Start from scratch again maybe, I don't know.

How is Vince Grella regarded in Italy?
I think pretty highly. He's always a regular wherever he goes to play. He's always been doing well. There are not many people in that position that have done what he's done, week in and week out. He's made his mark in Italy.

Do you hear much about Carl Valeri?
I'll read the papers, and try to look at the highlights and stuff like that. His club [Grosseto] had a very good season this year and he actually had a very good season too. I do get a little bit of information about how he's going and in the past season he's done very well.

Going from Inter, it must have been tough for him to go down a couple of tiers to play...
I think it's only benefited him, because he's got his time to play. Players like that need to play week in and week out.

LISTENING HARD

People have described how within your friendship with Vince, he seems to be the bossy one. Is that fair?
We're two different personalities. Vinnie's more the talkative one, and I'm more the listener.

The listener? Has it always been that way?
Yeah, I think it's always been his character just like it's always been my character too.

How does being an listener work in a typical team environment?
It is a team game, so you do mingle with the other players. But I'm probably the one who doesn't talk the most, let's say that.

How did your statue goal celebration (*as seen on page 19*) start?
I don't really have an explanation, I don't know. It just happened. One day, the first time I did it, I think it was in the first couple of years in Parma. Ever since then I've always done it, but there's no real explanation why or how it came about.

Do you think you'll keep on doing it?
If I keep scoring yeah. It's not something I think about anyway. I think it's just something, that if I score, whatever comes into my head I just do.

How are you approaching this off-season given last season there was some confusion over where you would be playing?
Firstly I want to have a break where I don't want to be thinking about anything, just enjoy my time off a bit. At the moment my mind is set to go back to Palermo and have another season there. If something comes up, I'll worry about it then.

Do you have any ambitions about where you want to play one day?
I don't know, just keep playing. It doesn't matter where I go. If an opportunity comes I will think about changing countries, changing the league. Maybe England more because there are so many Aussie players there. You'd be amongst it more with the Aussie players. Nowhere in particular though.

BRESH OF FRESH HAIR

Bresciano's iconic gleaming cranium in Australia's midfield was not always so. Several years ago, his tight ringlets made him more baby faced than the bald assassin we're used to now (*above*). He shaved off his hair for the first time in 2003. But even before that, for his debut NSL season in 1997/98 Bresciano donned a dashing pony-tail (*left*)

GO OD VALUE

Our tradition of the goal-scoring midfielder continues in the Qantas Socceroos with two of the top talents from two of the best leagues in the world

By Aidan Ormond

GOALS FROM DEEP - TOP AUSSIE PERFORMERS

Player	Goals	Games	Ratio
Tim Cahill	13	28	2.15
Aurelio Vidmar	17	44	2.6
Craig Foster	9	29	3.2
Mark Bresciano	10	41	4.1
Kevin Muscat	10	51	5.1

Like gold dust, the modern midfielder who ekes out a second life as a goalscorer is highly prized across the football world. And the Qantas Socceroos have not one but two examples of this – midfield goal getters Tim Cahill and Mark Bresciano.

The talismanic duo's 23 goals in 69 appearances for the Qantas Socceroos means as a pair, on paper, they average a goal once every three games. However, given the bulk of their appearances have come together, fans can expect a goal from either of the two players at least once every second match.

Everton's Cahill, sadly injured tonight, has appeared 28 times for the Qantas Socceroos with 13 goals to his name - a return of a goal almost every second match. Palermo's Bresciano has, at the time of writing, ten goals in 41 caps at around one goal every four matches.

The pair's healthy dividends in front of goal are some of the best in the Green and Gold over the last few decades.

But scratch through the stats veneer and we see that their achievements represent more than mere numbers.

Double act

"The Statue" and "The Corner Boxer"... Dance moves? Yoga poses? In fact, they are goal celebrations from Bresciano and Cahill respectively, which have appeared at vital moments in recent years.

In this very stadium, Aussie fans witnessed Bresciano's statue in the 35th minute of the do-or-die qualifier against Uruguay in November 2005. And we know the ramifications of *that* goal as the night unfolded so unforgettably.

Fast forward seven months and the "Corner Boxer" was revealed courtesy of a nation-stopping two goals from Cahill in the Qantas Socceroos' opening 2006 FIFA World Cup encounter against AFC giant Japan in Kaiserslautern.

Again, no need to explain the significane of that theatrical intervention by late substitute Cahill who first saved, then rocketed our FIFA World Cup campaign into another stratosphere with his second strike. But wait! From these two there's plenty more.

Bresciano added to his reputation as a goal-scoring midfielder with perhaps Australia's greatest-ever goal. In an AFC Asian Cup qualifier against Bahrain in 2006, the 28-year-old ghosted in behind the Qantas Socceroo forward line to latch onto a cross and volley home, horizontal, in the air, a goal of such timeless beauty it should be framed and put up in the national gallery.

> **"Fans can expect a goal from either of the two players at least once every second match"**

The goal capped a solid 2-0 win for the Qantas Socceroos but all the talk afterwards was of this moment of magic.

Cahill's famous flag boxer routine came out again a year later at the 2007 AFC Asian Cup. With the clock almost up, Oman looked to have derailed the Qantas Socceroos in their first game of the tournament. But out of the rain popped the Everton man to thump home a 90th minute equaliser for 1-1.

And in 2008, Cahill and Bresciano were in unison in the first 2010 FIFA World Cup qualifier for the Qantas Socceroos. Against Qatar at a carnival Telstra Dome, 50,000 plus fans witnessed a master-class from our two storied midfielders.

Cahill's first half angled header to make it 2-0 was classic Tim. Then there was Bresciano. The Palermo-based Aussie grabbed a third goal in a barnstorming first half – in doing so extinguishing Qatar's flickering hopes of clawing their way back. Working his way to the edge of the box, "Bresh" picked up a cross ball inside the box and calmly slotted home through Qatari legs.

There have been other goals too - Bresciano's beautiful effort against China in 2007; Cahill's goal against Norway in 2004 also in a friendly.

When you reflect back, these midfielders' scoring contributions have had a huge impact on our national team's fortunes in our recent past.

Past masters

Speaking of the past, other Australian midfielders have long been vital contributors to the score sheet. Jimmy Mackay's stunning long-range strike against South Korea in 1973 propelled the national team to its first-ever FIFA World Cup finals 34 years ago. This was without doubt the most important of the late Qantas Socceroo's five goals in 51 appearances.

By the 1980s silky-skilled Oscar Crino

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"Mark Viduka has been used successfully bringing midfielders playing off him into play"

became one of the Qantas Socceroos' most valued attacking midfielders with 12 goals in 70 outings. And by the 90s, a number of midfielders began to pop up on the scoresheet.

Defender Kevin Muscat's haul of 10 goals in 51 appearances – including a penalty in a 2001 World Cup qualifier with Uruguay – and Craig Foster's nine in 29, were also able goal contributions from outside the forward line (albeit many of these goals were against OFC oppositron). Joe Skoko's nine goals in 52 matches is also notable.

But there is one player who stands out from the pack of goal-scoring Qantas Socceroo midfielders from the past: Aurelio Vidmar.

"Viddy" scored 17 times for the national team in 44 'A' appearances at an average of a goal every 2.6 games. He debuted in 1988 and retired in 2001. And like Bresciano and Cahill, the attacking midfielder (who admittedly did often play in a forward role) also scored in the big matches when it mattered.

With his rock-star long hair, Vidmar was already a FIFA World Cup hit in 1993 when Diego Maradona's Argentina arrived in the country for their final qualifier against Australia.

A few months earlier, Vidmar's bullet header from a pinpoint Robbie Slater cross helped the Qantas Socceroos dispatch rivals New Zealand's World Cup dreams. And against Maradona's men, Vidmar scored again – a beautiful Ned Zelic through-ball found Tony Vidmar whose scuffed cross found his brother to angle the equaliser home.

Four years later and after a double against Hungary in a Budapest friendly (Australia won 3-1), the 1995 Oceania Player of the Year scored again in the white-hot FIFA World Cup qualifier against Iran which ended 2-2.

In fact, in 1997, the former Belgian League top scorer was on the score sheet eight times in 16 matches for the Qantas Socceroos. Sadly, Vidmar's talents were never seen on the FIFA World Cup finals stage.

After Vidmar's final game in the green and gold, it wasn't until 2004 that the tradition of the attacking Qantas Socceroo midfielder resumed so noticeably with the rise of Tim Cahill and Mark Bresciano.

This rise can also be traced back to systems and roles players have enjoyed. For instance, Mark Viduka has been used successfully as a single striker, bringing midfielders, playing off him both wide and central, into play. Josh Kennedy and Bruce Djite are men who look set to maintain this tradition.

This system only works though when you have goal-scoring midfielders you can rely on to get into good scoring positions, such as Cahill and Bresciano.

Dutch-based Brett Holman is another showing some potential in this role. His performance a year ago in a friendly against China offered promise and delivered his first goal for the senior national team.

But for the moment, we can all learn sit back and admire Tim Cahill and Mark Bresciano, the double act with double value looking for back-to-back FIFA World Cups with the Qantas Socceroos.

HOLLAND: THE FUTURE

Seven months ago, James Holland was little-known. But an eye-catching elevation to the senior side at the Newcastle Jets under Gary Van Egmond and an even more stunning elevation to become a fringe Qantas Socceroo has put him in the spotlight as a future goal-scoring midfie der.

Three goals from eleven appearances with the Hyundai A-League Champions Newcastle Jets is an impressive return for a young player.

Then there are plenty more in the Hyundai A-League. The Roar's Michael Zullo, Adelaide's Kristian Sarkies and Victory's Evan Berger all have potential to step up and get goals for the national team.

CHINA

Red Alert

There are 1.3 billion reasons why China should be a football force, but they remain underachievers at international level

By Richie Young

The China football team made a pledge on Chinese New Year's Day this year. The oath read: "By death to kill along the bloody road of defending the honour of the motherland and realise our youthful dreams."

While we hopefully won't see any blood tonight, make no mistake: China are a proud nation hungry for every opportunity to restore their reputation.

How hungry? Their recent record would give anyone indigestion. China bombed out at their first FIFA World Cup finals appearance in 2002. Three losses, nine goals conceded and no goals scored. They blew it under the pressure of the spotlight. It happened again in 2004, where at home in the final of the AFC Asian Cup they couldn't take home a frustratingly elusive trophy (in six trips to the semis they are yet to win a single title). In qualification for the 2006 FIFA World Cup, China failed to get out of their first qualifying group, being ousted by Kuwait on goal difference – despite conceding just one goal in six qualifying matches! Then last year at the AFC Asian Cup, a 3-0 implosion in their last group match cost them a quarter-final berth.

China as underachievers? That is the reputation the side wants to cast off, and a victory over Australia away from home could be just the thing to change their fortune cookies.

Chinese craving

The team is driven by an eagerness to make their mark on the international stage for the 1300 million or so people they represent.

Yet their motivation tonight is bolstered by something else. Reports from China suggest that the team has been promised a windfall of 500,000 Yuan ($75,000) for each victory over a nation ranked in the top 50. Australia are currently ranked 37th.

The devastating and heartbreaking earthquakes that hit south-western China in May will also add an element of emotion to tonight's match. The earthquakes affected the entire nation and have triggered an even higher level of national pride in China. When Adelaide United faced Chinese champions Changchun Yatai in the AFC Champions League soon after the quakes, their opponents approached the game with a steely determination, stating that they would be representing "all of China" in the match. As it happened, Adelaide came away with a fortunate 0-0 draw, but not before the Chinese had laid siege to the Australians' goal.

Kunming legacy

When the Qantas Socceroos flew into Kunming for the away fixture against China in this group back in March, they faced a well-drilled Chinese side who had been comprehensively preparing at

VITAL STATISTICS

Full name People's Republic of China

Capital Beijing

Currency: Yuan

Current FIFA Ranking: 79

Highest: 37 (December 1998)

Lowest: 103 (August 2006)

National populus average age (in years): 31.5

Life expectancy at birth (in years): 72.2

THE COACH

Vladimir Petrovic
Born in 1955, Petrovic is regarded as a legend at his former club Red Star Belgrade where, as a player, he won a host of trophies including the Yugoslav League Championship. He has played in the final of a UEFA Cup and in the 1982 FIFA World Cup. Petrovic also played for Arsenal in England as well as in France and in Belgium. He was known for his technique, passing and creative vision on the field.

Since his playing days, Petrovic initially worked as an assistant coach before taking the full reigns at Red Star in the mid-1990s. He moved to Chinese club Dalian Shide in 2005 and had a one-year stint coaching Kuwait's Olympic team that ended last year.

For China he works alongside another Serbian, Ratomir Dujkovic, the Olympic team coach.

high-altitude for three weeks ahead of the match. Kunming has an elevation of 1,900 metres, and is China's centre for high-altitude training. Considering the bulk of Australia's Europe-based stars arrived in China just 48 hours before kick-off, this choice of venue was not without controversy.

Qantas Socceroos coach Pim Verbeek told media at the time: "To try to give the team every chance of success, the Chinese federation is using every trick in the book, which is why the Socceroos are playing at altitude, at the hottest time of the day, at the end of a long journey deep into the southwest of the country."

The ensuing draw represented "Mission Accomplished" for Pim Verbeek and his squad - a fair result given the tricky conditions - but it was a huge disappointment for the home side. To add to the home fans' frustrations, China had a golden opportunity to win the match. China striker Qu Bo won a penalty after a collision with Mark Schwarzer in the dying minutes and it looked like the Qantas Socceroos were set to lose in another heart-breaker - much like the way Australia were knocked out of the FIFA World Cup by Italy in Kaiserslautern.

"Shao Jiayi, the Chinese player who took the penalty, was dropped for China's next match"

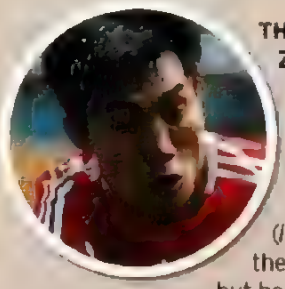
But Schwarzer proved yet again to be another colossus in front of goal. Just like he did against Uruguay in 2005, and Canada twelve years before that during FIFA World Cup qualifying, the 196cm shot-stopper crucially saved a penalty.

SIX PLAYERS TO WATCH

THE TOUGH GUY
Sun Jihai
30-year-old Sun Jihai (*below*) is one of just a handful of players from China who have successfully made a career playing in Europe. The Manchester City defender is known for his pace and strength as well as his attacking runs and dangerous crosses into the box. Though he has entered the twilight of his career, his stature and pedigree continue to inspire China's younger generation.

THE YOUNG GUN
Zhou Haibin
At age 22, Zhou (*below*) has already accumulated more than 30 caps for the national team. Standing over six feet tall (185cm), Zhou is the archetypal Chinese midfielder: physically dominant, technically proficient, extremely fit with an ability to score.

THE VETERAN
Li Weifeng
A star at Shanghai Shenhua (a side that Hyundai A-League club Sydney FC met in the 2007 AFC Champions League), this central defender (*above*) is renowned for his skill and dominance in the air. He has been a regular in the side since 1999, racking up over 90 appearances. Li is famous for his terrible disciplinary record, which at one point resulted in him being stood down from the national team for a run of red cards. At that stage he was national team captain!



THE CAPTAIN
Zheng Zhi
Currently playing for Charlton Athletic in England, Zheng (*left*) is not only the Chinese captain, but he is a handy scorer from the midfield. He is also remembered, somewhat infamously, for fracturing French international striker Djibril Cissé during a collision in an international friendly match. His technique is such that he has been known to play in every position on the field. For Charlton he is used mostly as a defensive utility, but he has recently been deployed as a playmaker for the national side, for whom he has scored more than a goal every four matches.

THE ATTACKER
Han Peng
At 185cm, Shandong Luneng striker Han Peng (*right*) is developing some enviable statistics at national level since his 2006 debut, scoring at a rate of around one goal every two matches. He is regarded as a solid Chinese prospect, favoured recently in the national team for his strong build. If crosses reach him with some accuracy, expect him to test Mark Schwarzer tonight.

THE SUPER SUB
Qu Bo
Although he has played second fiddle to Han Peng so far this campaign, Qu Bo (*below*) was the man who beat Australia's off-side trap to earn his side a penalty in the qualifier in March. Having already earned 40 appearances for the national side, at 25 Qu has not yet reached his peak. He can be used as a striker but is perhaps more effective on the wing.

"It's definitely a highlight," Schwarzer said following the match. "I thought the penalty decision was harsh and to lose it then would have been unjust, as I thought we deserved something from the game. I think if you look at our preparation and the conditions we had to play in, it's an amazing result."

Shao Jiayi, the player who took the penalty and one of the few playing in Europe, was dropped for China's next qualifying match. Underachieving is clearly no longer an option.

Coaching capers
China are desperate to return to the form that saw them reach the 2002 FIFA World Cup (under Serb Bora Milutinovic) and the Final of the 2004 AFC Asian Cup (under Dutchman Arie Haan).

China are still regarded as one of the most physically-dominant teams in the region but since those successful outings, they have proven to be a team that is well organised defensively but impotent in the attacking third of the field. Critics in China also maintain that the team still lacks the collective stamina to make an impact at international level.

Beyond those two tournaments, China's record on the international football stage is scattered with a host of disappointing results. China's national men's sides at the Olympics and East Asian Cup

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Shao missing the vital penalty against Australia

have rarely managed to reach the final stages, however the 2005 East Asian Cup was one standout achievement. In that four-country tournament, China drew with South Korea and Japan as well as beat North Korea on its way to their first coveted trophy. Zhang Yaokun and Ji Mingyi were respectively named Best Defender and Most Valuable Player for their efforts. Zhang has been a regular since then, though Ji has been so far unable to lock down a place in the squad.

Reaching the 2004 AFC Asian Cup final remains one of the team's greatest achievements, despite their loss to Japan. On home soil under Dutch coach Arie Haan, China beat Indonesia, Qatar, Iraq and Iran along the way but fell at the final hurdle when they went down 3-1. Astonishing audience TV audience figures emerged following that match: over 300 million people in China alone tuned in to watch the Final making it the most-watched sports event in the country's history.

"Reaching the 2004 AFC Asian Cup final remains one of the team's greatest achievements"

Zheng Zhi is a fine all-round talent

After Haan failed to take the team to Germany in 2006 however he was replaced by Zhu Guanghu, a home-grown coach who had ambitions to lead the team all the way to South Africa. However, after China disappointed at the 2007 AFC Asian Cup under him (their 3-0 loss to Uzbekistan and blowing a 2-0 lead against Iran cost them a spot in the play-off rounds), current coach Vladimir Petrovic was brought in. With the 2002 FIFA World Cup highlight still in mind, the China Football Association was keen to try and replicate the team's previous success with a Serbian manager at the helm. Current coach Vladimir Petrovic is currently working alongside another Serb, Ratomir Dujkovic, who is currently preparing the Olympic side for Beijing.

Petrovic has had mixed successes with China. After some excellent early performances, his side has not yet lived up to China's high expectations and may be out of a job even before his contract expires later this year.

Will tonight's match prove to be the quiet passing of Petrovic, or can China make a stand? The Reds have nothing to lose: Australia had better be on alert.

THE CSL

China's national club competition, the Chinese Super League, was launched in 2004 as a rebranding of the previous Chinese domestic league. Initially the competition involved 12 teams, but it expanded to include 16 at the start of the current season. The teams finishing first, second, third and fourth qualify for the AFC Champions League.

AUSTRALIA

fill in numbers as lineups are announced

GOALKEEPERS
- [ ] Ante Covic
- [ ] Michael Petkovic
- [ ] Mark Schwarzer

DEFENDERS
- [ ] Michael Beauchamp
- [ ] David Carney
- [ ] Chris Coyne
- [ ] Brett Emerton
- [ ] Lucas Neill
- [ ] Jade North
- [ ] Matthew Spiranovic
- [ ] Nikolai Topor-Stanley
- [ ] Rodrigo Vargas

MIDFIELDERS
- [ ] Mark Bresciano
- [ ] Nick Carle
- [ ] Jason Culina
- [ ] Vincenzo Grella
- [ ] James Holland
- [ ] Mile Jedinak
- [ ] Carl Valeri
- [ ] Luke Wilkshire
- [ ] Ruben Zadkovich

FORWARDS
- [ ] Bruce Djite
- [ ] Brett Holman
- [ ] Harry Kewell
- [ ] Scott McDonald
- [ ] Mile Sterjovski
- [ ] Archie Thompson
- [ ] James Troisi

CHINA

GOALKEEPERS
- [ ] Song Zhenyu
- [ ] Yang Zhi
- [ ] Zong Lei

DEFENDERS
- [ ] Cao Yang
- [ ] Feng Xiaoting
- [ ] Li Weifeng
- [ ] Sun Jihai
- [ ] Sun Xiang
- [ ] Wang Xiao
- [ ] Wu Hao
- [ ] Xu Yunlong
- [ ] Yuan Weiwei
- [ ] Zhang Shuai
- [ ] Zhang Yaokun

MIDFIELDERS
- [ ] Du Zhenyu
- [ ] Hao Junmin
- [ ] Huang Bowen
- [ ] Liu Jian
- [ ] Wang Dong
- [ ] Xiao Zhanbo
- [ ] Zheng Zhi
- [ ] Zhou Haibin

FORWARDS
- [ ] Gao Lin
- [ ] Han Peng
- [ ] Jiang Ning
- [ ] Qu Bo
- [ ] Zhu Ting

Meet the Socceroos

AUSTRALIA

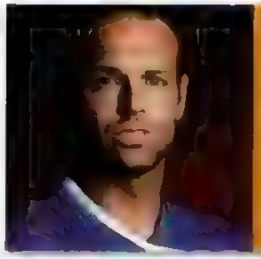
Eleven of these players, from the recent training and matchday squads, are likely to start against China tonight

GOALKEEPERS

Ante Covic

AGE: 33
POSITION: GOALKEEPER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS
APPEARANCES: 2

Ante made his Qantas Socceroos debut against Bahrain in February 2006 when Australia won 3-1 and also played earlier this year against Singapore. The big keeper was fortunate enough to be third choice at the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany. A starring role for the Championship winning Jets in the Hyundai A-League has pushed him back into contention for the number one jersey.



Michael Petkovic

AGE: 31
POSITION: GOALKEEPER
CLUB: SIVASSPOR (TURKEY)
APPEARANCES: 5

After more than 150 appearances with former national league side South Melbourne, Petkovic moved to Turkey in 2002. This season his club finished equal second in the league and qualified for the UEFA Intertoto Cup. They were officially fourth based on head-to-head results. Nonetheless, only Turkish Champions Galatasaray conceded fewer goals than Petkovic's side.

Mark Schwarzer

AGE: 35
POSITION: GOALKEEPER
CLUB: FULHAM (ENGLAND)
APPEARANCES: 56

Mark's place in Australian footballing history is set thanks to his FIFA World Cup qualifying heroics against Uruguay in 2005. He began his Qantas Socceroos career in similar fashion by starring in a shoot-out victory over Canada during a 1993 FIFA World Cup qualifier in his first senior start. A star in the English Premiership, Mark has recently made a high-profile move to Fulham. A true Australian sporting hero.

Appearance figures correct as of 13/6/08

DEFENDERS

Michael Beauchamp

AGE: 27
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: FC NURNBERG (GER)
APPEARANCES: 15

Michael made his national team debut away to Bahrain in February 2006 in an AFC Asian Cup group qualifier. Since moving to Germany in 2006 following the FIFA World Cup, he has been a fringe player for Nurnberg. He has played more than a dozen games for them this season including three in the UEFA Cup. With injuries and absences limiting Australia's defensive stocks, his importance to the national side has risen markedly in 2008.

David Carney

AGE 24
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: SHEFFIELD UTD (ENG)
APPEARANCES: 10

David is an excitement machine. He caught the eye with some outstanding performances at the 2007 AFC Asian Cup finals, playing in the unfamiliar role of left wing-back. It earned him a contract with ambitious English club Sheffield United after being a key member for Sydney FC. Carney scored a brilliant goal for the national team against Nigeria last November and has become a regular in the left full-back position for the Qantas Socceroos.

Chris Coyne

AGE: 29
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: COLCHESTER (ENGLAND)
APPEARANCES: 1

Older brother of Perth Glory full-back Jamie Coyne, Chris has been playing his club football in England for over a decade. Originally at London side West Ham, he then bounced around England's lower leagues before finding form and stability at Luton Town and now Colchester. He has not played representative football since appearing for Australia's Under 17s in 1995, but his leadership skills and calmness under pressure have returned him to Qantas Socceroos contention.

Brett Emerton

AGE: 29
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: BLACKBURN (ENGLAND)
APPEARANCES: 65

Brett has been a regular Qantas Socceroo since the late '90s when he debuted aged just 18. After captaining Australia at the 2000 Sydney Olympics he moved to Feyenoord then later completed a dream move to the English Premier League and Blackburn Rovers. Brett is one of the best athletes ever to pull on the Green and Gold. If he plays beyond 2010 it is highly likely he will become the most-capped Qantas Socceroo ever.

Lucas Neill

AGE: 30
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: WEST HAM UNITED
APPEARANCES: 41

Lucas made his Qantas Socceroos debut over 10 years ago as a teenager but it's only over the last four or five years that he has really established himself as our defensive lynchpin. At the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany, he became one of our most recognisable players after a series of commanding performances. Neill's efforts during the tournament's group stage impressed many and inspired a new generation of Australian fans.

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DEFENDERS

Jade North

AGE: 26
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS
APPEARANCES: 19

A mobile and versatile defender, North fits the bill for the modern Qantas Socceroo perfectly. The Newcastle Jets captain has been recognised at national level, having played for our national U17 U20 and U23 sides as well as the senior side over the last eight years. He starred in March's draw with China, keeping the home side's powerful strikers scoreless and has a long future in Green and Gold ahead of him

Matthew Spiranovic

AGE: 19
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: FC NURNBERG (GER)
APPEARANCES: 0

Another Australian currently plying his trade at German Bundesliga side Nurnberg, Spiranovic was last year the subject of speculation after Croatian officials contacted to him in a bid to get the highly rated defender to play for their national team Spiranovic has already represented Australia at youth level and has committed his future to the Green and Gold, debuting in the friendly against Ghana in May.

Nikolai Topor-Stanley

AGE: 22
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: PERTH GLORY
APPEARANCES: 1

Another of Graham Arnold's star Qantas Under 23s who have come of age over the last two seasons as the side qualified for the Olympics through the AFC for the first time, Nikolai made his name in the Hyundai A-League with Sydney FC before transferring to Perth Glory last season. With naturally left-sided players a commodity in the national team, Nikolai has a huge future, and his ability to play in the defensive line will ensure he remains a key man during qualification.

Rodrigo Vargas

AGE: 29
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: MELBOURNE VICTORY
APPEARANCES: 0

This classy defender only made his debut for Hyundai A-League side Melbourne Victory in 2006, after starring in Victoria's premier league. Since then he has established himself as one the league's best defenders, won a Hyundai A-League Championship, played in the AFC Champions League and forced his way into Qantas Socceroos reckoning. As a sweeper he shows skilful distribution and excellent positional sense

MIDFIELDERS

Mark Bresciano

AGE: 28
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: PALERMO (ITALY)
APPEARANCES: 41

After representing the Qantas Young Socceroos in 1999 and the Qantas Under 23s at the Sydney Olympics, Mark has etched out an excellent career in the Italian Serie A. Clubs such as Empoli, Parma and now Palermo have benefited from his intelligent attacking runs and powerful, precise free kicks. One of Australia's stars of the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany, Bresciano is a valuable midfielder who always poses a goal-scoring threat.

MIDFIELDERS

Nick Carle

AGE: 26

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: BRISTOL CITY (ENGLAND)

APPEARANCES: 7

Nick is widely known for his flair and creativity and can unlock defences with his trickery and vision. He featured in Australia's 2007 AFC Asian Cup campaign, scoring in the penalty shoot-out against Japan and has since played in Turkey and is now with Bristol City in England. Nick won the coveted Hyundai A-League's Johnny Warren Medal as the player of the year following the 2006/07 Hyundai A-League season, and provides Australia with a playmaking option when required.

Jason Culina

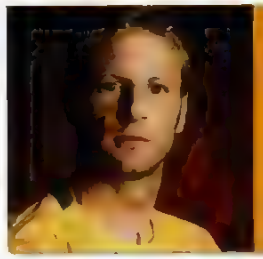
AGE: 27

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: PSV EINDHOVEN (HOL)

APPEARANCES: 31

Jason's mobility, link play and ability to play the ball out of midfield intelligently will be vital on the journey to South Africa for the Qantas Socceroos. He is now considered to be one of the national team's most important players for his consistency and versatility. For PSV this season he played in both the UEFA European Champions League and the UEFA Cup, and also won the domestic Dutch league title for the third time.



Vince Grella

AGE: 28

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: TORINO (ITALY)

APPEARANCES: [redacted]

A hard working midfielder who closes down opposing players and mops up stray passes, Grella is a vital cog in the Qantas Socceroo engine room. He blossomed with Empoli in Serie A and upon their relegation in 2004 was signed by Parma where he was reunited with his fellow Qantas Socceroo Mark Bresciano. He currently plays with Torino, and is a certain starter for Australia when fit.

James Holland

AGE: 19

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS

APPEARANCES: 1

James' rise to Qantas Socceroo selection has been nothing short of meteoric. At just 18, James broke into the Hyundai A-League with the Newcastle Jets during last season. The attacking midfielder's running, precision passing, deft free kicks and ability to score impressed many - including the man he needed to most: Pim Verbeek. The Dutchman handed Holland his debut in March in the friendly against Singapore. James looks likely to become a household name in the future.

Mile Jedinak

AGE: 23

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: CENTRAL COAST MARINERS

APPEARANCES: 1

Only a couple of years ago Mile was playing in the New South Wales state league. But after two outstanding seasons with the Central Coast Mariners in the Hyundai A-League, he has forged his powerful frame into Qantas Socceroos reckoning. A bruiser in midfield, Jedinak will dominate his opponent no matter what it takes and also possesses a powerful strike. If the opposition have a danger-man Mile, given the chance, is the man to keep him quiet.

MIDFIELDERS

Carl Valeri

AGE: 23

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: GROSSETO (ITALY)

APPEARANCES: 8

The defensive midfielder has represented Australia at all levels and made his debut for the Qantas Socceroos in March 2007 against China. Carl has played all his professional football in Italy, after he was signed by Serie A giant's Inter Milan, who have loaned him out to smaller clubs to gain experience. He is expected to be a regular Qantas Socceroo for years to come, either as Grella's successor or by playing alongside him as an almighty midfield double act.

Luke Wilkshire

AGE: 26

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: FC TWENTE (HOLLAND)

APPEARANCES: 24

Playing for the Qantas Under 23s at the Athens Olympics put Wilkshire in the mix for the Qantas Socceroos. He moved from Middlesbrough to Bristol City in 2003 where regular first team football improved his game, as shown by his impressive displays at the 2006 FIFA World Cup. This season he helped his Dutch side FC Twente qualify for the UEFA Champions League. He has developed into one of our most reliable midfielders.

Ruben Zadkovich

AGE: 22

POSITION: MIDFIELD

CLUB: DERBY COUNTY (ENG)

APPEARANCES: 0

Wollongong-born Ruben is one of our most athletic players, his tremendous aerobic ability an asset in difficult Asian conditions. He went to lower league English clubs as a teenager, but soon came home to develop his game. At Sydney FC he proved himself in the Hyundai A-League as a versatile wide midfielder or defender and his promising displays earned him a recent move to Derby County in England where he will debut next season.

FORWARDS

Bruce Djite

AGE: 21

POSITION: FORWARD

CLUB: GENCLERBIRLIGI (TUR)

APPEARANCES: 2

Another of Australia's brilliant youngsters, Djite combines power and athleticism with a growing striker's instinct. American born with African parents, Bruce broke into the Hyundai A-League and terrorised defences with his bustling, bruising style while still a teenager. With all the right physical attributes, Djite looks set for a long career in the Green and Gold. He will be playing with Genclerbirligi in Turkey next season.

Brett Holman

AGE: 24

POSITION: FORWARD

CLUB: NEC NIJMEGEN (HOL)

APPEARANCES: [redacted]

Brett burst onto the old national league scene as a 17-year-old and was soon snapped up by Dutch giants Feyenoord. He was then loaned out to Excelsior, although the club was later relegated from the Dutch top flight. Brett moved to NEC Nijmegen at the end of the 2006 season - he also debuted for the Qantas Socceroos that year against Bahrain. This season he helped his club qualify for the forthcoming UEFA Cup.

Harry Kewell

AGE: 29
POSITION: FORWARD
CLUB: IN NEGOTIATIONS
APPEARANCES: 32

Recently voted one of the top five Australian footballers of all time by *FourFourTwo* magazine, Kewell is an Aussie sports superstar. His performances at the 2006 FIFA World Cup were memorable as was his goal over a decade ago in a FIFA World Cup qualifier against Iran. Despite suffering a series of injuries over the last two years, Harry is still a huge danger and a constant threat no matter which team he comes up against

Scott McDonald

AGE: 24
POSITION: FORWARD
CLUB: CELTIC (SCOTLAND)
APPEARANCES: 7

Consistent performances for Motherwell in the Scottish Premier League earned Scott a full international call up for the Qantas Socceroos against Bahrain in 2006. Since then, Melbourne born Scott has become the hottest Aussie striker in Europe, scoring a bagful of goals for Scottish giants Celtic in the domestic league as well as in the UEFA Champions League. He has just helped the Hoops to the Scottish league title

Mile Sterjovski

AGE: 29
POSITION: FORWARD
CLUB: DERBY COUNTY (ENG)
APPEARANCES: 33

Mile is another talented product of the Wollongong football scene. He first got noticed in the late '90s in Australia's domestic league. He moved to Europe in 2000 - first with Lille in France then Switzerland's Basel where he made his name as both an attacking wide midfielder and forward. In January he moved to Derby County in England where his class and determination impressed the local fans despite his side's poor run of results

Archie Thompson

AGE: 29
POSITION: FORWARD
CLUB: MELBOURNE VICTORY
APPEARANCES: 28

Livewire striker Archie holds the world record for the most goals in an international match, scoring 13 times for the Qantas Socceroos against American Samoa in 2001. After a successful stint in Belgium, Archie returned home and has been a consistent and effective scorer in the Hyundai A-League with his hometown club Melbourne Victory. Injured early against China earlier this year, Archie is on the comeback trail, eager to reclaim his spot in the side

James Troisi

AGE: 19
POSITION: FORWARD
CLUB: IN NEGOTIATIONS
APPEARANCES: 1

James has been on the fringes of the big-time for a couple of years now. The talented attacking midfielder plays a lot like Harry Kewell - he can take players on, deliver dangerous crosses and can score. Having recently been released by Newcastle United in the English Premier League, Troisi is keen to prove his worth to get his career back on track, and this match provides the perfect opportunity for one of Australia's most promising young talents.

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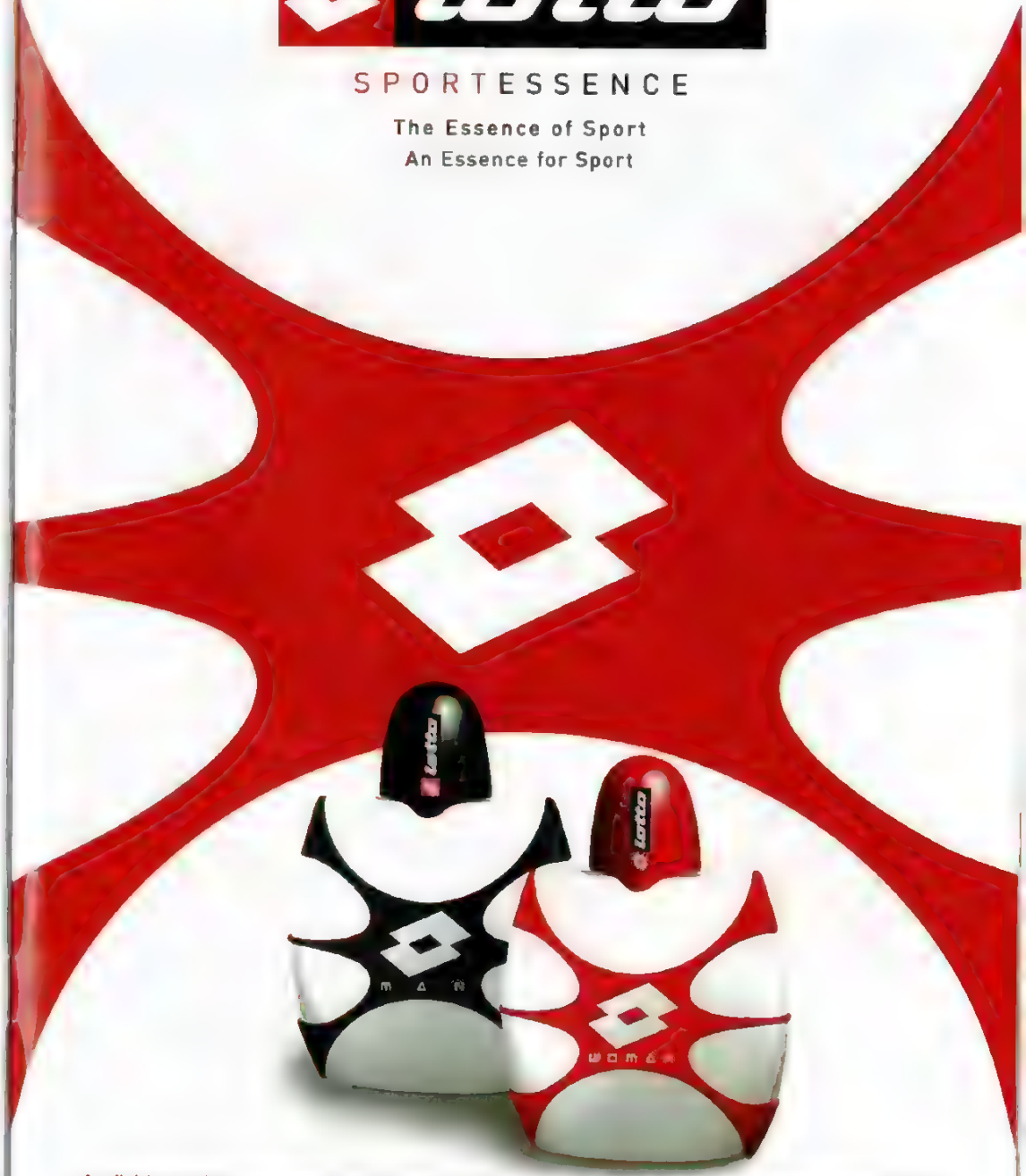

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When the Qantas Under 23s take to the field against Serbia in August for their first match at the Olympics, it will be just reward for an arduous journey

By Richie Young

THE ROAD TO BEIJING

CAMPAIGN MEMORIES

(Clockwise from top left) Aaron Downes opens the scoring in a 3-1 win over Iran in Adelaide in May 2007; Troy Hearfield celebrates his equaliser with Tarek Elrich in the friendly against Mexico in March; Graham Arnold about to send David Williams on against Iraq in Gosford in November last year (he scored the sealer in a 2-0 win); Adam D'Apuzzo puts his hand up for Olympic selection against Mexico earlier this year; Where it all began - Nathan Burns and Bruce Djite celebrate one of the many goals against Chinese Taipei; Kristian Sarkies scores against Jordan in March last year - though the match ended in a 1-1 draw and was the only time Australia didn't win on home soil in the whole campaign.

The 2008 Qantas Under 23s are pioneers. Not for the thousands of kilometres they have travelled across half the world during the last two years, nor for the mountain of fixtures they've played (14 competitive and at least the same number of friendlies or trials). They are pioneers because, for the first time ever, Australia's Olympic Games qualification place was won through Asia.

After formally joining the Asian Football Confederation on January 1 2006, both our national and club sides are faced with more regular and tougher matches against Asian sides. The Qantas Under 23s know this better than anyone.

Australia's preparations for one of the world's biggest and most prestigious tournaments began well over two years ago when, in March 2006, the team began a series of camps that led to the Spring Cup tournament held in Vietnam. In that tournament, against Iran and Uzbekistan's Under 23s sides and the senior national team of Vietnam, Australia did not concede a goal (though they finished second in the tournament on goal difference).

Following that positive start, the squad's preparations went into overdrive under the guidance of both Graham Arnold and Football Federation Australia's Technical Director Rob

WHO'S GOING?

All players born on or after January 1985 are eligible for selection. In addition, Arnold looks likely to exercise the option of selecting three over-age players. He has suggested that they will be attacking players as he is more satisfied with the defensive stocks already in the squad. Harry Kewell, Mark Bresciano, Tim Cahill, Scott McDonald, Josh Kennedy... who would you take? Graham Arnold will announce his 2008 Beijing Olympics football squad in early July. Sadly, Danny Vukovic looks likely to miss the Games due to suspension.

Baan. The first stage of qualifying took place in February 2007 when the team played Chinese Taipei home and away – winning both matches (including the first leg 11-0!). But while Chinese Taipei may have been easily accounted for, qualifying was only just getting started.

The qualification process would become a testing affair, over two further stages and in some of the most difficult conditions that Australian sporting teams have ever faced.

After the matches against Chinese Taipei, the team took on another six nations (home and away) in two separate phases of qualification. In total, Australia won six, drew five and lost one match against Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Korea DPR and Lebanon – scoring 30 goals and conceding five.

Only two other nations qualified from the region: along with Australia, South Korea and Japan have also successfully negotiated the testing path to the Beijing Olympic Games.

And though we eventually made it, qualification went down to the wire and was extremely difficult throughout.

Australia needed to come back from a goal down in North Korea to draw in their final match, and there were appeals that our goal was actually scored by Adrian Leijer's hand!

Even more telling was the fact that in the entire qualification process Australia won just two matches away from home. The first was against Chinese Taipei 1-0 (the home leg score was 11-0), while the second was a 4-0 defeat of Jordan who had already been eliminated.

Selection dilemmas

With a squad of just 18 players allowed in Beijing, coach Graham Arnold is faced with some tough choices about just who to take to the Games. To date, Arnold has selected more than 40 players during the qualification process. He will also enlist three senior Qantas Socceroos to play alongside the youngsters (see "*Who's Going?*").

Speaking with *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Arnold said: "Since we went into our first camp, the squad has grown in stature enormously. The core of the squad comes from two groups - the under 20s who went to Holland in 2005, and the under 20s who went to India two years ago. Then you throw in someone like (Newcastle Jet) James Holland, who's come from nowhere.

"In that time, I've probably used around 40 players, but I've never been able to call upon all the players at the same time because a lot of our qualifiers were on non-FIFA qualifying dates. Now we're down to the final stage, and obviously it's going to be an extremely difficult task to narrow it down to just 18 players, especially when you factor in the three over-age players. Competition for places is intense, and some players will have only minimal time to impress. But that's how you like it, and that's why the team culture is so important."

Indeed, the players themselves have made it clear that they are hungry to be involved with, and succeed at, the Games. While the bulk of the players are regulars in the Hyundai A-League, Arnold has also drawn on a number of our finest young players plying their trade in leagues around the world. Players such as Ersan Gulum (Vestel Manisaspor, Turkey), David Williams (Brondby, Denmark), Neil Kilkenny (Leeds United, England), Adrian Leijer (Fulham, England) and James Troisi (formerly Newcastle United, England) all featured at various stages of the qualification process and are hopeful of making Arnold's final squad. To complicate matters, a number of young stars such as Queensland Roar winger Michael Zullo have emerged in only the last twelve months as bolters to make the team.

Former Sydney FC and now Derby County player Ruben Zadkovich said of the prospect of representing Australia in Beijing: "It's a massive ambition. It's been one of my biggest goals. To get to the Olympics is massive in anything. It's a huge achievement and it's definitely something that's on the top of my list."

Well aware of the selection challenges, Arnold maintains confidence in the group's depth and says the experience gleaned in Asia will bode well at kick-off time in Shanghai. The conditions in China are expected to be tough – the players are preparing to face extreme humidity and sweltering 30-plus degree heat.

"Playing in Asia has taught us a lot about the conditions we will face in China and that could give us an advantage.

"I think that we've got a very talented group here. There's a good mixture and a good blend and I've tried to highlight the players out of this group that can handle these conditions and run for 90 minutes. Because as I saw at the Asian Cup, if you can't run then tactics and everything pretty much go out the door," says Arnold.

Heating up

While Australia's qualification was confirmed in November last year, preparations ahead of August have not slowed. A squad of 21 players travelled to San Francisco in the United States in March to face a strong Mexican side. The group, including newer faces like Central Coast Mariners striker Matt Simon, Melbourne Victory defender Sebastian Ryall, Queensland Roar attacker Tahj Minniecon and Newcastle Jet Tarek Elrich went to the US with one thing in mind: to press their claims for a permanent spot within the group. Played

THE INTERCONTINENTAL CUP

Last month, a squad of 21 Qantas Under 23s headed to Kuala Lumpur to compete in the Intercontinental Cup as part of the team's preparations.

The eight team tournament proved to be hugely-successful for Australia. After beating Croatia, Chile and Togo in the group stage, Australia advanced to the Final to face top African side, Nigeria. Despite a 2-0 loss there, Arnold remained upbeat following his side's consistently solid performances.

"I learnt a lot about the players and their ability to perform and back up in these conditions and they performed excellently. I am very positive looking forward. These players have given me a selection headache for Beijing."

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in front of a huge crowd of 47,440 at McAfee Coliseum, the match ended in a draw after an 18th minute own goal was cancelled out by an equaliser from Troy Hearfield, now signed to Hyundai A-League side Wellington Phoenix.

More recently Arnold has intensified the training program for his players, firstly with an eight-day camp held in Townsville's hot and sticky conditions.

Following the North Queensland camp, the group travelled to Malaysia to successfully compete in the Intercontinental Under 23 Cup (see *"The Intercontinental Cup"*) against fellow Olympic Medal hopefuls in Nigeria, Croatia, Ghana, Iraq, Ireland, Malaysia and the team that Australia will face in its second match at the Games, South American giants Argentina.

Since returning from Malaysia, another training camp has been held - this time in Darwin as the group continues to acclimatise by playing in the heat of northern Australia.

Along with Argentina and Serbia, the third country the Under 23s will face in China will be Ivory Coast. Amazingly, the Beijing Olympic Football draw held in April eerily recreated much of the draw for the Athens 2004 Games. Back then, Australia drew Argentina, Serbia and another African nation (Tunisia).

Arnold believes the experience and success of 2004 will play to Australia's advantage as his team looks to better the quarter-final finish in Athens.

"Last time we had a similar group and we did very well to make the quarter-finals," said Arnold, who was an Assistant Coach to Frank Farina in 2004. "We know we can get through this group, we have history and also we have had such a tough schedule just to make it this far which will hold us in good stead."

Each opponent is formidable: Argentina were runners-up to Brazil in the 2007 South American Youth Championships, Serbia made the final of the 2007 UEFA European Under 21 Championships and Ivory Coast managed five wins from six matches during Olympic qualifying.

But while the challenge of Beijing facing Australia's finest young players cannot be argued, the lengths our own side has gone to for the Beijing Games has been unprecedented.

For the first time in Australia's football history, our Olympic football hopefuls will have been bred in a fully professional club competition, the Hyundai A-League. They will also have come through one of the toughest qualifying campaigns in the world as part of the Asian Football Confederation and will have had the benefit and experience of enduring a thorough and comprehensive warm-up schedule. There is no reason to believe that Australia cannot better their best effort so far - fourth place in 1992 - to finally a claim a medal.

TRACK RECORD

Australia have already played at seven Olympic tournaments. After the 1956 Melbourne Games, it would be another 32 years before Australia would participate again, when they played in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. Since then Australia have qualified for every Olympics tournament through Oceania, and now Asia.

After the under 23 age restriction was introduced in 1992 as a means to further differentiate the Games from the FIFA World Cup, the Qantas Under 23s have played 15 tournament matches with four wins, two draws and nine losses.

GENERATIONS

We look into the past and on to the future at two players who share a gift for ball-playing

PAST
PAUL OKON

Paul Okon was one of Australia's most gifted and hard-working players of the last twenty years

Okon burst onto the Australian football scene with his club Marconi as a 17-year-old and in his first season won the competition's young player of the season award. As an 18-year-old he made his senion national team debut, was instrumental in Australia reaching the FIFA World Youth Championships semi-finals and became a full-time professional in Belgium. As a 19-year-old, he contributed to Australia's best-ever finish of fourth at the Barcelona Olympics. Before he was 25 he had won the best player award in Belgium and signed for Lazio in Italy's Serie A. Despite serious injuries Okon played professional football in the English Premier League and only retired at the end of the second season of the Hyundai A-League last year.

The qualities that led to his rapid rise through the football ranks, and enabled him to continue in the game long after his peers had hung up the boots, were his appreciation of tempo, supreme ball-playing ability and physical presence.

Okon was the master of how best to use the ball at different times and in different circumstances, and his size and strength allowed him to play in defence or in midfield. Even in his final season in 2006/07, Okon's ability to initiate the attack from his deep position as sweeper was one of the primary reasons for the Jets' dramatic late surge to the Preliminary Final in that campaign.

When Okon was on the ball, fans knew to expect magic. He serves as a reminder that young Australian players can become as technically outstanding as players anywhere else in the world, and they should aspire to be nothing less.

FUTURE
STUART MUSIALIK

Few Aussies today can stroke the ball around the park as sweetly as Sydney FC's Stuart Musialik

Newcastle-born Musialik has long been regarded as one of our brightest prospects. Now 23, having already won the Hyundai A-League title, he has just been recruited by Sydney FC for the upcoming season as one of the keys to John Kosmina's overhaul of the Sky Blues.

He has graduated from the Qantas Young Socceroos to the Qantas Under 23s but has not yet broken into the full international side.

Though only slight in stature, standing 175cm (5' 9"), Musialik has nonetheless carved out a reputation as the finest distributor in the Hyundai A-League. His supreme control, positioning and passing allowed Newcastle to adopt the attractive, possession-based, free-flowing game that has won them both plaudits and a Championship trophy.

For the last two seasons in Newcastle, possession began with the ball at Musialik's feet. He would collect the ball, often shimmying or turning to throw off a defender, before moving the ball forward or more commonly wide. He was a pleasure to watch and will be severely missed by Gary Van Egmond and Jets fans.

With only limited mobility, Musialik may not be as versatile as Okon and will rarely take players on with the ball at his feet. As a result, he has specialised on the role of deep-lying distributor in midfield. His statistics of just three goals and one assist in more than 50 appearances in the Hyundai A-League are testament to that.

For Musialik to take the next step in his personal development, those same abilities that allow him to so successfully keep possession – his touch, awareness and control of the speed of the game – must be utilised further up the pitch. If he can meet this challenge, surpassing Okon's 28 caps for Australia is not out of the question.

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IF THE CAP FITS

1 Which Australian player has more full international caps...

A Graham Arnold or John Kosmina (*pictured above*)?
B Mark Bosnich or Zeljko Kalac?
C Mark Viduka or Johnny Warren?
D David Zdrilic or David Mitchell?
E Paul Okon or Ned Zelic?

2 Which Australian player has more full international goals...

A Stan Lazaridis or Tony Popovic?
B Josip Skoko or Paul Agostino?
C Milan Ivanovic or Craig Moore?
D Paul Trimboli or Aurelio Vidmar?
E Paul Wade or Charlie Yankos?

3 Which Australian player made his full international debut earlier...

A Clayton Zane or Lucas Neill?
B Scott McDonald or Nick Carle?
C Patrick Kisnorbo or Tim Cahill?
D Eddie Krncevic or David Mitchell?
E Mile Sterjovski or Mark Bresciano?

TRULY CHINESE

1 Which five of these are not teams competing in the Chinese Super League alongside reigning champions Changchun Yatai (*pictured below*)?

A Dalian Haichang
B Henan Construction
C Guangzhou Pandatown
D Shenzhen Railway
E Shanghai Shenhua United
F Zhejiang Red Shooters
G Pro-Dinosaurs Shandong
H Chengdu Blades
I Beijing Guoan
J Wuhan Firetigers

2 Out of Australia, China, Iraq and Qatar, based on FIFA's world rankings as of June 4, where is China placed?

3 How many yellow cards did Chinese players receive in the March draw with the Qantas Socceroos?

4 In which city was the 0-0 draw between Australia and China played?

5 What was the name of the Chinese player who played for Adelaide United in the Hyundai A-League?

6 Who has more caps, Brett Emerton or China's Li Weifeng?

7 Which Chinese player played on loan at PSV in 2007?

8 Which Chinese player was substituted after 45 minutes in his only appearance for Glasgow Celtic?

9 For which two English clubs has Sun Jihai played?

10 What was the score between China and Australia in the 2006 AFC Women's Asian Cup final?

ANSWERS!
IF THE CAP FITS 1 a Kosmina 60, Arnold 56; b Kalac 54, Bosnich 17; c Viduka 44, Warren 43; d Zdrilic 30, Mitchell 29; e Zelic 33, Okon 28. 2 a Popovic 8, Lazaridis 0; b Skoko 9, Agostino 7; c Moore 3, Ivanovic 0; d Vidmar 17, Trimboli; 14 e Wade 10, Yankos 7. 3 a Neill 1996, Zane 2000; b Cahill 2004, McDonald 2006; c Kisnorbo 2002, Carle 2005; d Krncevic 1979, Mitchell 1981; e Sterjovski 2000, Bresciano 2001. TRULY CHINESE: 1 C, D, F, G and J are not real clubs 2 Third 3 One 4 Kunming 5 Gu Shengqing 6 Li Weifeng 7 Sun Xiang 8 Du Wei 9 Crystal Palace, Manchester City 10 2-2 (1/1) 4-2 to China on penalties

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GARY HA
APPETITE FOR SUCCESS

Gary Ha moved here from China 30 years ago but still loves the men in red

AGE: 50
OCCUPATION: Restauranteur
SUPPORTS: China

What are your plans for the match?
Probably I will shut the door for the day [at the restaurant] and bring my staff, my waiter, my cook and my friends to support the Chinese national team.

Have you seen China play live before?
I've never seen the Chinese national team play in a stadium before but I watch every single game we play through the TV. Through Chinese television or Foxtel.

What are your feelings about the match tonight?
It's definitely exciting. More than exciting! Football in China is the number one sport. Everybody stands behind the national team.

Who is your favourite player?
Currently, probably Zheng Zhi, the captain. He comes from Charlton in England. And Sun Jihai, another one of my favourite players. Both Zheng Zhi and Sun Jihai are probably the key players in the national team, having played in the English Premier League for such a long time. I think they've got the experience and they uplift the team and their performance.

What are the weaknesses of the side?
The problem with the Chinese team is that they can't score too many goals. Particularly at top level competition, when we're playing against other countries we hardly score any goals. At the moment Han Peng is the striker. He needs some experience. He has already missed good chances at crucial moments in competition. He's got good potential as a striker though: he's tall, fast. It's a lack of experience.

Who are some other up and coming Chinese players?
Dong Fangzhuo from Manchester United (*pictured right*). A young player, but he has been with Manchester United for many years. He has got the potential to be a star for the national team, one of the key players for the national team for the next five to ten years.

With Dong not in the squad, are you keen to see any other players?
They call him 'Big Brother': Li Weifeng. A very menacing defender, he is powerful but very rough while playing. Still, he is a reliable player with a lot of experience.

What do remember about the 2002 FIFA World Cup?
From the 2002 World Cup in Korea and Japan, [I remember] the sour feeling because the Chinese national team couldn't score any goals at all. They lost all three matches, all good matches, but they couldn't score any goals. I'm looking forward, if the Chinese national team can join the World Cup finals and then them hopefully scoring their first ever goal for China, for Chinese people.

What did you think of China in the 2007 AFC Asian Cup?
They played good in the first two games, but for the third game they lost by three goals, and I think it was one of the biggest upsets so far. The national team always loses concentration at the last moment, the last crucial match we lose.

Why do you think that is?
Probably the pressure put on the players. Too much expectation from the country. They put too much pressure on the national team.

What did you think of the draw with Australia in March?
I think China, because the Australian team is much stronger than them, played defensively. They wanted a draw, a draw was good enough. The thing is that in the last bit of the game they couldn't score the penalty kick. That was the crucial moment for the national team qualification to the next level. The guy who missed the penalty, Shao Jiayi, is not in the team for Australia.

How does soccer's popularity in China compare with basketball, table tennis and gymnastics?
They are very popular sports, they have made some good efforts and got good achievements in world competitions, but I still think football is the number one sport. Every single person is interested to watch the football team play.

What do you see for China's future?
We've been looking forward for a long time for the Chinese national team to perform in the top competitions like the FIFA World Cup or other competitions like the Asian Cup. I still think our Chinese national team is good enough - they've got the potential players to perform well.

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All the numbers you need to know about Australia's opponent

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CHINA'S INTERNATIONAL TELEPHONE PREFIX

1,321,851,900

CHINA'S POPULATION
AS OF 2007, ROUGH(ISH) ESTIMATE

6

TIMES OUT OF THE LAST NINE AFC ASIAN CUP TOURNAMENTS THAT CHINA HAVE MADE THE SEMI-FINALS (FOR ZERO TITLES)

-9

CHINA'S GOAL DIFFERENCE IN THEIR ONE AND ONLY APPEARANCE AT THE FIFA WORLD CUP FINALS, IN 2002

14

COUNTRIES THAT SHARE A BORDER WITH CHINA

300 000 000

ESTIMATED CHINESE TV VIEWING AUDIENCE OF 2004 AFC ASIAN CUP FINAL BETWEEN CHINA AND JAPAN

4

PLACES CHINA (RANKED 79) ARE ABOVE GROUP RIVALS QATAR ON THE FIFA RANKINGS

20.02

PERCENTAGE OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION THAT LIVES IN CHINA

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